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First description of the nest of Buff-tailed Sicklebill *Eutoxeres condamini*

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Received 18 November 2003; revision received 1 November 2004

Buff-tailed Sicklebill *Eutoxeres condamini* occurs in lowland *terra firme* of south-west Colombia and eastern Ecuador and Peru. *Eutoxeres* hummingbirds are members of the hermit subfamily (Trochilidae: Phaethornithinae), whose members lack showy or iridescent plumage. *Eutoxeres* are unique in having stout legs, which are used to cling to *Heliconia* and *Centropogon* flowers, their preferred food sources (Hilty & Brown 1986, Fjeldså & Krabbe 1990). Although several nests of *E. condamini* have been noted in the literature (Fjeldså & Krabbe 1990, Salaman *et al.* 2002), to my knowledge this note constitutes the first detailed nest description.

The occupied nest was discovered on 10 February 1994 in closed-canopy forest at Jatun Sacha Biological Station, 20 km east of Tena, Napo province, Ecuador (01°04'S, 77°36'W, 450 m). The breeding season was previously considered to be perhaps September–November in Peru (del Hoyo *et al.* 1999).

The nest was suspended from a palm leaf of *Prestoea schultzeana burret* (Palmae), 1.2 m above a small stream. The nest was attached to a narrow leaflet, 55 cm long and 3–4 cm wide, and the construction commenced 15 cm down from the petiole (Fig. 1). The nest was 35 cm long, its maximum external diameter 7 cm, cup

depth 3.5 cm, inside width of cup 3.2 cm and distance from bottom of cup to bottom of nest 20 cm. It was constructed of mosses, rhizomes and other fine plant materials, giving the nest a dark brown coloration. The cup was lined with course materials resembling palm-leaf pinnules. Woven into the bottom of the nest were small dried leaves (Fig. 1a), which are a common feature of hermit nests (Ruschi 1982, Vigle 1982) and likely assist in disrupting its outline. As with most hummingbird nests, spider webs were used extensively in nest construction, especially around the cup and on points of attachment to the leaf. A unique feature was a strong assemblage of spider webs that originated from the 'tail' end of the nest and were attached to the tip of a nearby leaflet, which held a few plant tendrils and leaves (Fig. 1b).

According to Ruschi's (1982) classification of hummingbird nests, that described here falls into the Type I category, characterised by their elongated shape with a main body that extends into a caudal apex and, in being loosely woven, the eggs or nestlings are visible through the material. Hummingbirds with this type of nests are also found in the genera *Ramphodon*, *Glaucis* and *Threnetes*. The nest described here differed from previously described nests of those genera, and that of congeneric *E. aquila* (Vigle 1982), in having distinct sides extending 8.5 cm from

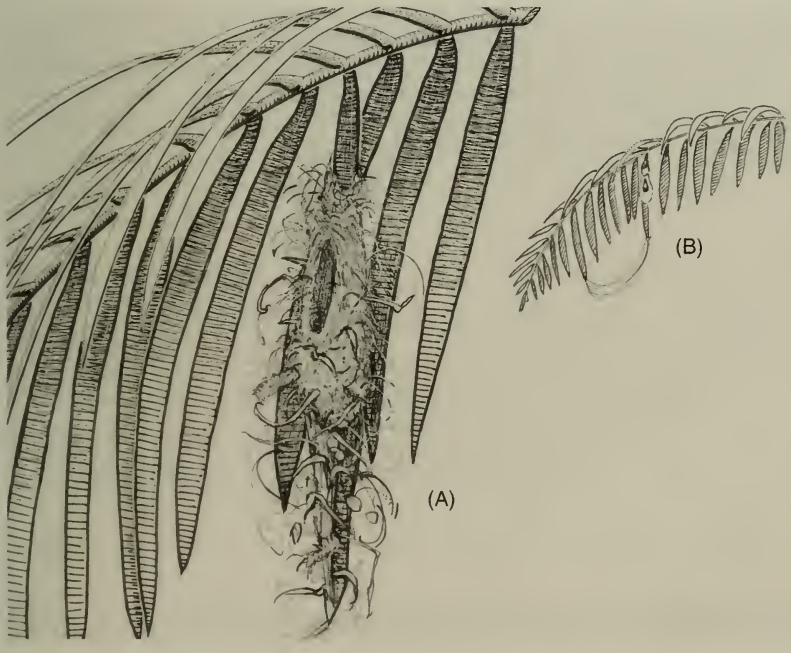

Figure 1. Nest of Buff-tailed Sicklebill *Eutoxeres condamini* showing well-developed overhang above cup, collection of leaves and fine plant materials at the base (a), and attachment to nearby leaflet (b), Jatun Sacha Biological Station, Napo province, Ecuador, 1994.

the cup's rim and culminating in a well-developed overhang (Fig. 1a). The sides and overhang probably offered protection from rain and visual detection by predators; the palm leaflet to which the nest was attached was thin. In contrast, the nest of *E. aquila* described by Vigle (1982), was attached to a broad section of a *Heliconia* leaf that appeared to offer considerable protection.

The nest described here was sited over running water, which is common amongst Neotropical hummingbirds (Davis 1958, Skutch 1964, Haverschmidt 1968, Vigle 1982). A possible reason for nesting over water is that fecal matter can be deposited directly over the side of the nest and carried away by the water. This may be advantageous considering the liquid nature of hummingbird excrement (which cannot be transported in sacs) and its potential for attracting predators.

When I discovered the nest, the adult departed on my approaching to within 2–3 m. The nest contained two recently hatched nestlings. On 13 February, I returned to observe the adult. In 70 minutes of observation, the adult left and returned to the nest six times, but always remained within 20 m of it. During this period the adult perched on the nest for 25 minutes with its bill in a near-vertical position, a characteristic perching posture for hermits with nests of this type (Skutch 1964, Ruschi 1982, Vigle 1982). When I returned on 18 February the nest was unoccupied but was otherwise unchanged.

Acknowledgements

James Norwalk donated his time and expertise for the illustration. Bonnie Bochan graciously offered countless hours of friendship and guidance during my stay at Jatun Sacha, and Steve Herman encouraged this manuscript through his never-ending support of my work. Robert Steidl and Jose Telli provided comments on earlier versions of the manuscript.

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